

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Robie House

AND/OR COMMON

Robie House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

5757 South Woodlawn Avenue

— NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Illinois

— VICINITY OF

CODE

17

COUNTY

Cook

CODE

037

3 CLASSIFICATION**CATEGORY**☐ DISTRICT☒ BUILDING(S)☐ STRUCTURE☐ SITE☐ OBJECT**OWNERSHIP**☐ PUBLIC☒ PRIVATE☐ BOTH**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**☐ IN PROCESS☐ BEING CONSIDERED**STATUS**☒ OCCUPIED☐ UNOCCUPIED☐ WORK IN PROGRESS**ACCESSIBLE**☒ YES: RESTRICTED☐ YES: UNRESTRICTED☐ NO**PRESENT USE**☐ AGRICULTURE☐ MUSEUM☐ COMMERCIAL☐ PARK☒ EDUCATIONAL☐ PRIVATE RESIDENCE☐ ENTERTAINMENT☐ RELIGIOUS☐ GOVERNMENT☐ SCIENTIFIC☐ INDUSTRIAL☐ TRANSPORTATION☐ MILITARY☐ OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

University of Chicago (Office of Special Events, Administration Building)

STREET & NUMBER

5801 Ellis Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Illinois

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Cook County Recorder and Registrar of Titles

STREET & NUMBER

118 North Clark Street

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

STATE

Illinois

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey (ILL-1005)

DATE

1963 and 1967

☒ FEDERAL ☐ STATE ☐ COUNTY ☐ LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT
☒ GOOD
☐ FAIR

☐ DETERIORATED
☐ RUINS
☐ UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

☐ UNALTERED
☒ ALTERED

CHECK ONE

☒ ORIGINAL SITE
☐ MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Robie House has been called Wright's strongest statement in domestic design. Its free-flowing interior spaces, overhanging roofs to shade windows and balconies, indoor recreation spaces, and strong horizontal lines forecast trends in house design during the following 50 years.

As sculpture it can be considered an abstraction in lines and planes. Pictorially the tawn brick and dove-colored concrete trim are pleasing to the eye. The entrance has been awarded a minor role and treatment of the chimney stack lends drama. Inside the sensations of security and privacy are enhanced by elevating the principal rooms one story above a raised basement. The garage was another novel feature of this house and probably for the first time in American architecture, it became an integral part of the whole.

The Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks declared Robie House a landmark, "In recognition of the creation of the Prairie House--a home organized around the great hearth where interior space, under wide sweeping roofs, opens to the outdoors."

The asymmetrically planned house, with overall dimensions of 154'-9" by 60'-0", fits very exactly on the original 200' by 60' lot. The exterior walls are of large reddish-orange brick which were made in St. Louis, and the Capstones, lintels, sills, water table and other trim are of light grey stone. The several red clay tile roofs are hipped with a low pitch and deep overhanging eaves.

Although a number of windows have been re-glazed with clear glass, the newly built Robie House had windows with one geometric pattern of colored glass repeated in every window in the house. The wall around the courtyard originally was several feet higher, but later owners reduced the height of the wall in order to obtain matching bricks to use to add a storage room east of the garage. The floor plan, with alterations of the Wright plan noted, can be seen on the enclosed HABS drawings.

Wright also designed much of the furniture, which was made by George Niederken of Milwaukee, as well as a hand-woven rug made in Austria. The furniture and all the woodwork were oak, with a "golden oak" finish. The furniture, some of which was built-in, was related in style to what was called the mission style in the United States and some of it still exists, in storage. Wright himself described the house as:

As type of structure especially suited to the prairie will be found in Robie House, which is virtually a one-floor arrangement, raised a low story height above the level of the ground. Sleeping rooms are added where necessary in another story. There is no excavation for this type, except for heating purposes. The ground floor provides billiard rooms or playrooms for children. This plan raised the living room well off the ground, which is often damp, and avoids the ordinary damp basement. (Robie House was built on land formerly a swamp.)

Wright, in his Princeton lectures, Modern Architecture, said that Robie House embodies these ideas:

0. Rejection of the high, jumbled house of the time, with hot attic, damp basement.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1907-1909 (construction) BUILDER/ARCHITECT B.B. Barnard Company, builder
Frank Lloyd Wright, architect

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Robie House was designed and constructed (1907-1909) by Frank Lloyd Wright, for Frederick Carleton Robie. One of the finest representative examples of the mature work of this famous architect, it has been designated as an official landmark by the Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks. In 1957, a panel of leading architects and art historians cited the Robie House as one of the two outstanding residences built in the United States in the preceding 50 years. This clean-cut brick structure, which Wright developed in his inimitable "prairie style" to fit the confines of a city lot, has won international acclaim as a recognized turning point in modern domestic architecture.

House and Home Magazine featured "One Hundred Years of American Homes", in its May, 1957 issue, timed to observe the centennial of the American Institute of Architects. Succinctly expressed, Robie House was the House of the Century. "Since 1857 no house has had more influence," was the unqualified appraisal of this respected publication.

It is a hard task to summarize the significance of Robie House and its real impact on our cultural life today, yet House and Home accomplished this feat with notable success and with brevity that invites quotation:

No House in America during the past hundred years matches the importance of Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House.

Above all else, the Robie house is a magnificent work of art. But, in addition, the house introduced so many concepts in planning construction that its full influence cannot be measured accurately for many years to come. Without this house, much of modern architecture as we know it today might not exist.

Here, in one house designed 50 years ago, Wright demonstrated such diverse ideas as to open plan; the combination of windows in continuous strips; the projection of the roof soffit in deep cantilevers far out beyond the glass; the use of continuous inside-to-outside walls to join the house to its garden; the effectiveness of a low slung roof to make the house seem more in repose; and the importance, for the same reasons, of horizontality throughout.

Similarly the Architectural Record during 1956 and 1957 ran a special feature, "One Hundred Years of Significant Buildings." Again the Robie House (February, 1957) won highest honors in rating by the Record's professional panel on the most significant buildings built in America during the past fifty years. A critical commentary by

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Architectural Forum, April 1957.

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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 16 450440 4624380
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Robie House was built on a 60 by 210 foot city lot and the overall dimensions of the house are 154'-9" by 60'-0." As seen on the enclosed HABS location plan, the boundary of the national historic landmark which is immediately surrounded by residences and office buildings, is the dimensions of the property owned by the University of Chicago, described as: Lot 16, and the south 10 feet of lot 17, Block 71 of Gray and Gaylord's subdivision of Block 71 and west half of 62. (cont'd)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Blanche H. Schroer, Landmark Review Project; S. Sydney Bradford, 1964

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

3/20/76

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 L Street NW

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington, D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

9/8/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

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CONTINUATION SHEET Robie House ITEM NUMBER #7 PAGE 2

1. Starting the house at ground level, marked by a simple water-table.
2. Placing the living area, then, at an upper level, for view and air.
3. Keeping the house low, horizontally extended (association with the prairie).
4. Conceiving the walls as screens, emphasizing this by bands of windows in the second story.
5. Roofs of gentle slope, and with broad expansion beyond the walls (sense of shelter; echo of the prairie).
6. A broad fireplace (and low, broad chimney on the exterior), as center or focus of the design (associated ideas of warmth, domesticity).
7. Free-flowing living area, avoiding boxlike rooms.
8. Plasticity (connectedness) achieved by: A. Surface of ceiling carried down the walls to window tops, so that walls and ceiling "flow together"; B. Wood trim continuously flowing at top of windows and doors, and at the floor, and these connected by thin vertical bands; and C. Other ways "too tedious to describe in words."
9. Outswinging windows, to associate the house, by this gesture, with the outdoors.
10. Heating and lighting integrated as architectural features.
11. Furnishings to be designed with the architecture, if possible.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Robie House ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE 2

Alan Burnham, A.I.A., merits quoting:

The Robie house created at the domestic level something new to the eyes of 1909 Chicago, supplanting the symmetrical classicism of the day by an asymmetrical monumentality. In the structurally expressive use of piers, wall planes, and strips of windows all clustered about a central chimney, one senses an unusual coherence of planning. Visually this produced a bold interplay of forms with strong horizontals at different levels, originating in but leading away from the dominant vertical. The fenestration represented a radically new concept, with its almost continuous light source interrupted only by structural piers and amply shaded by wide eaves; the logical outgrowth of a harsher climate to which the conventional New England window had never been properly suited. One senses Wright's complete mastery of the house of that low-lying horizontal type of dwelling which he had originated and named the "Prairie House."

Robie House was designed and constructed by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1907-1909, for Frederick Carleton Robie, a native Chicagoan who had made his fortune in bicycles and sewing machines. Robie is reported to have told Wright, "I want a fireproof, reasonably priced house to live in not a conglomeration of doodads." The costs fell within the framework of reasonableness set by the client--for the lot he had paid \$14,000; the house was estimated at \$35,000, with \$10,000 more for furniture either designed or selected by the architect. The plans were a sweeping departure from the traditional four square approach of Living Room, Parlor, Dining Room, and Kitchen. Robie House polarized fresh architectural concepts which "saved us twenty years," according to Mies Van der Rohe, the famous German architect and teacher.

There is every reason to believe that the Robies cherished their home, which conferred international fame on them as patrons of architecture. When they disposed of it after some years of residence, it was to an appreciative owner in the person of Marshall D. Wilber, head of the Wilber Mercantile Agency. John Lloyd Wright, in his biography of his father tells us that the Wilburs loved the place and preserved everything as it was originally built. Commenting on the occasion when he accompanied the older Wright to dinner, he continued: "The old brown-stained furniture and woodwork was cleaned and polished. The soft autumn shade on the sand-finished wall panels had been maintained. The special light fixtures and leaded glass windows were clear and bright...After we left, Dad said to me: 'You see John, that's an example of a house that has character, it grows more valuable as it grows older.'"

The Robie family lived in the house for two and a half years. The next owner, the W. Taylor family, sold it to Marshall D. Wilber after six months. The Wilbers lived in

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CONTINUATION SHEET Robie House ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE 3

the house 15 years. The Chicago Theological Seminary bought the house from the Wilbers for \$100,000 in 1926, primarily as a site for future expansion, and used it variously as a women's dormitory, a classroom, building, a refectory, and a conference center. In 1957, the Seminary announced that it would raze the building to provide part of a site for married student's housing. The announcement brought a flood of protests from many, but none of the protesting individuals or organizations was able to suggest or finance a plan for the preservation of the building. However, Webb & Knapp, who had the contract as the redeveloper for the Hyde Park urban renewal project, bought Robie House for \$102,000, to use as construction headquarters. The Seminary acquired the land just to the north of Robie House, which provided enough space for the new housing. At the time it announced its intention to raze Robie House, the Seminary said approximately \$75,000 in structural repairs was required, and the cost of bringing the building into compliance with the Building Code of the City of Chicago would be an additional \$25,000. Webb & Knapp made no structural changes. In 1962, the company offered to donate the house to any agency that would undertake to preserve it.

On February 4, 1963, the University of Chicago accepted the responsibility to maintain and use Robie House in perpetuity provided the substantial sum required to restore and repair it would be collected by those who wanted it preserved. An international committee of more than a hundred architects, historians, critics, and educators was then formed, with members representing all parts of the United States, Australia, England, France, Japan, Switzerland, Brazil, India, Italy, and Germany. The fund-raising drive for \$250,000 was opened in 1963. This amount included restoring the original details of construction, as well as bringing the house into conformity with current building code standards. A considerable amount of delicate hand removal and repair was required. In February 1964, Taliesin Associates Architects were named as architects for the restoration. By December 1965 \$62,990 had been collected. With this money, a new ceramic tile roof duplicating the original has been laid; and a new gas heating unit and new electrical service wiring have been installed.

The Adlai Stevenson Institute of International Affairs has occupied the house for a decade. A 1967 article in The Prairie School Review said that in their planning for the use of Robie House the Institute wanted a seminar and conference center as well as offices for their staff. Lacking funds for a complete restoration, the Institute decided to make such repairs as would bring the structure up to modern code requirements, do a thorough cleaning, and provide needed facilities by careful use of original and new furnishings.

With regards to alterations of the original Wright plan for the Robie House, the same article reported:

Many built-in furnishings and fittings are missing such as the dining room buffet and the inglenook seat beside the living room fireplace. On the exterior, the unfortunate tuckpoint performed in recent years must be

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CONTINUATION SHEET Robie House ITEM NUMBER #8 PAGE 4

removed, and redone to re-establish the proper horizontal emphasis to the house. The east garden wall should be restored to its original height and the addition to the garage must be removed. (p.18).

Presently, the house is in structurally sound condition, but much of the details and the Wright-designed fixtures are in need of repair and restoration.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Robie House ITEM NUMBER #9 PAGE 2

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Original Historic Sites Survey Report by S. Sydney Bradford, 1964.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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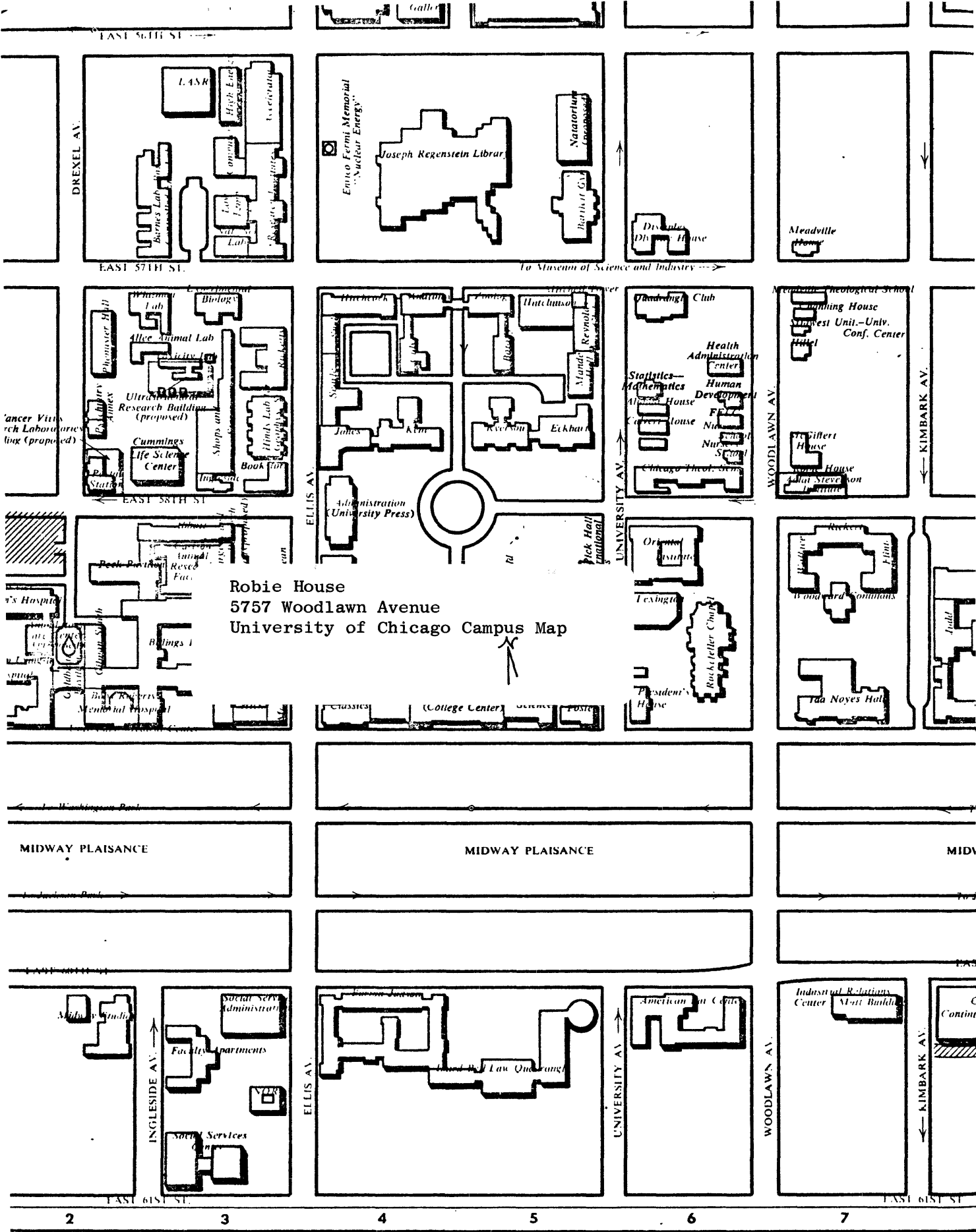
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CONTINUATION SHEET Robie House ITEM NUMBER #10 PAGE 2

Beginning at the northeast corner of the intersection of 58th Street and Woodlawn Avenue, the boundary runs north along the east curb of Woodlawn Avenue, then east along the property line to the alley midway through the block, then south along the property line to 58th Street, then west along the north curb of 58th Street to the beginning point.



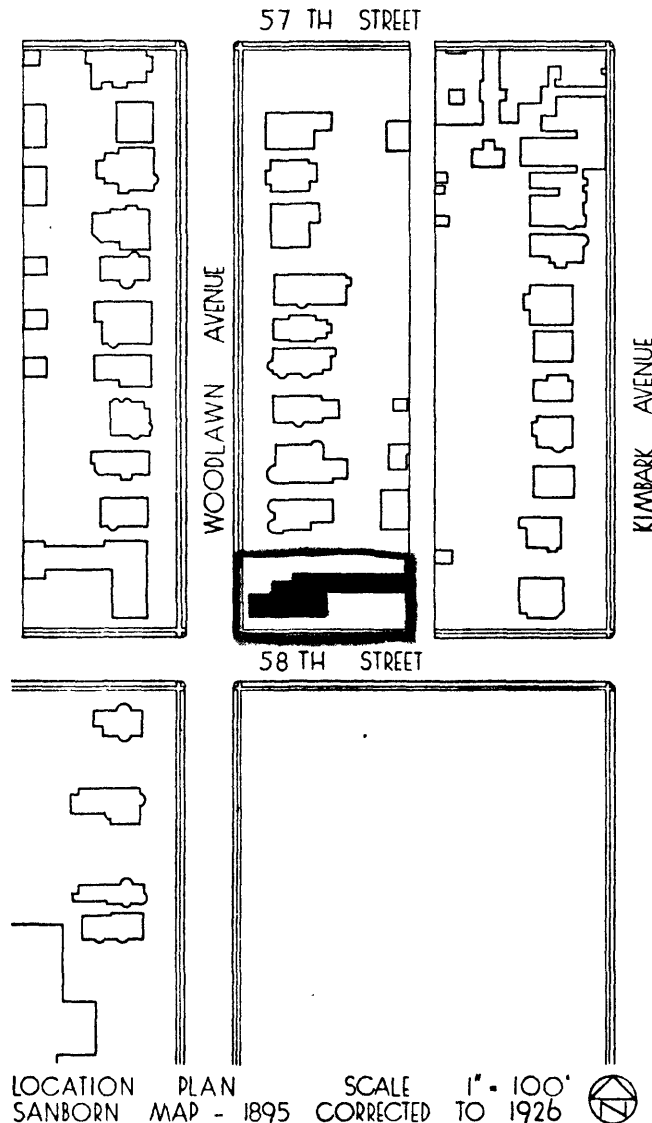
Neighbors

prayer and meditation ment plutonium was first isolated (August 10, 1942)

American Bar Center (E. C. 1155 E. 6th St.)

FREDERICK C. ROBIE HOUSE

FRANK
LLOYD
WRIGHT



THE ROBIE HOUSE, BUILT IN 1908 - 1909, WAS DESCRIBED BY ITS ARCHITECT, FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, AS "A MASONRY STRUCTURE OF TAWNY BRICK AND STONE WITH RED TILE ROOF, EAVES OF COPPER, WOODWORK OF OAK THROUGHOUT. THIS BECAME KNOWN IN GERMANY AS DAMPFER ARCHITECTURE. IT WAS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THE PRAIRIE HOUSE OF THAT PERIOD."

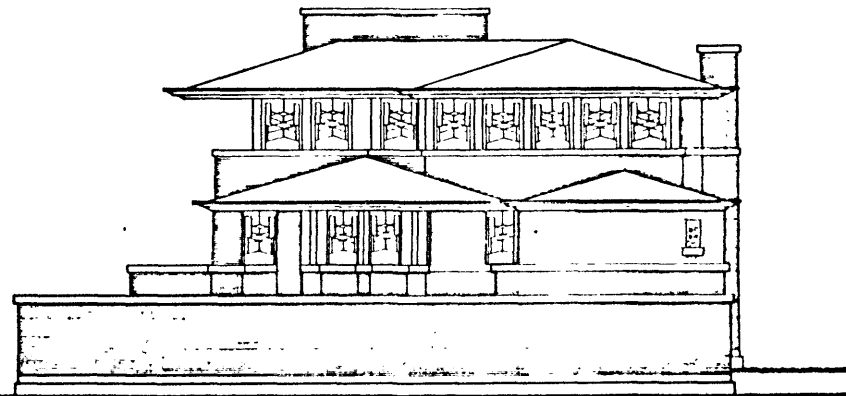
COMMISSION ON CHICAGO ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS CITED THE ROBIE HOUSE AS "A HOME ORGANIZED AROUND A GREAT HEARTH WHERE INTERIOR SPACE, UNDER WIDE SWEEPING ROOFS, OPENS TO THE OUTDOORS. THE BOLD INTERPLAY OF HORIZONTAL PLANES ABOUT THE CHIMNEY MASS, AND THE STRUCTURALLY EXPRESSIVE PIERS AND WINDOWS, ESTABLISHED A NEW FORM OF DOMESTIC DESIGN."

RECORDED BY THE UNITED STATES NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

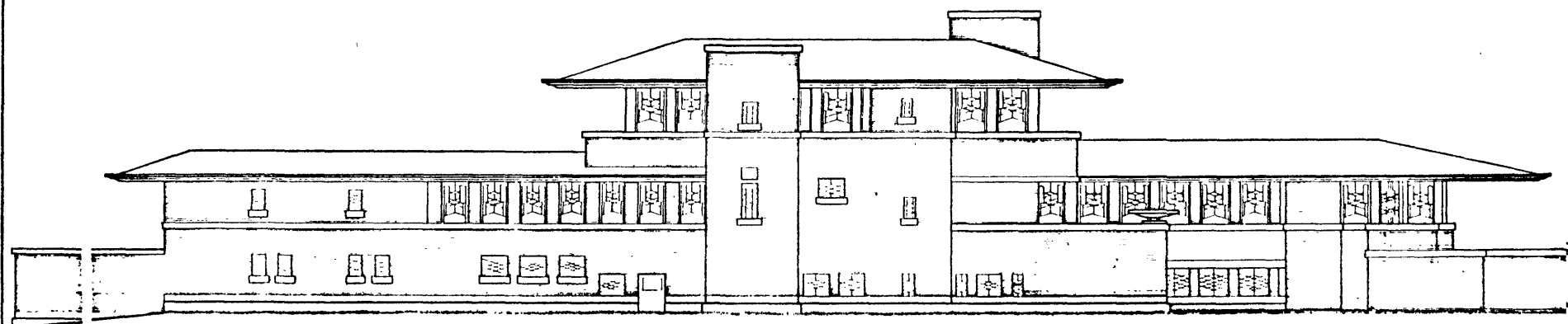
THIS PROJECT WAS FINANCED FROM FUNDS OF THE "MISSION 66" PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE - MEASURED AND DRAWN AUGUST, 1963, UNDER THE DIRECTION OF JAMES C. MASSEY, HABIS SUPERVISORY ARCHITECT, AND EARL H. REED, FAIA, PROJECT SPONSOR, BY OSMUND R. OVERBY (UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO), PROJECT SUPERVISOR, AND STUDENT ASSISTANT ARCHITECTS JĀNIS J. ERINŠ (ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY), ROBERT C. GIEBNER (MIAMI UNIVERSITY OF OHIO), AND DAVID T. VAN ZANTEN (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY), AT THE CHICAGO, ILLINOIS FIELD OFFICE. THE DRAWINGS WERE PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY NPS ARCHITECT A. CRAIG MORRISON.



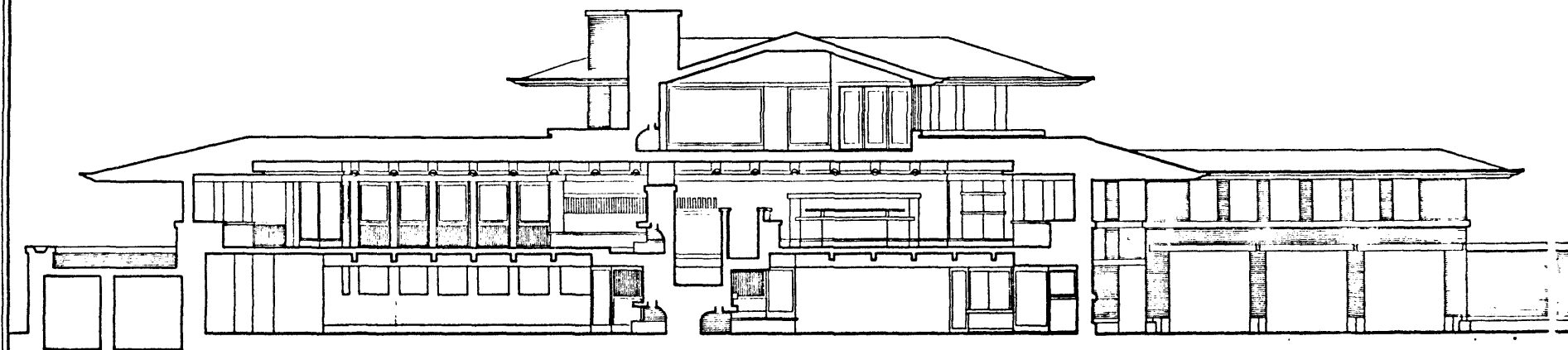
WEST ELEVATION



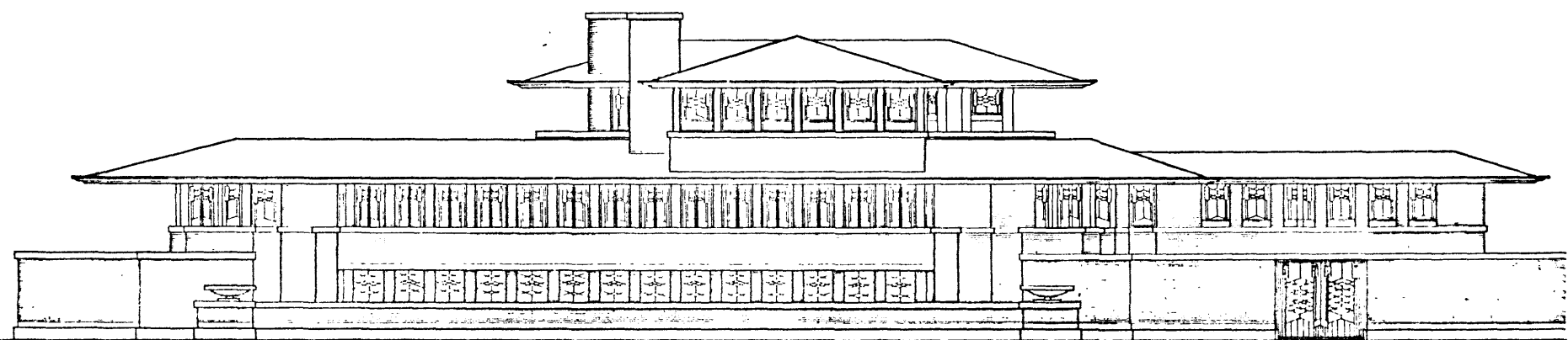
EAST ELEVATION



NORTH ELEVATION



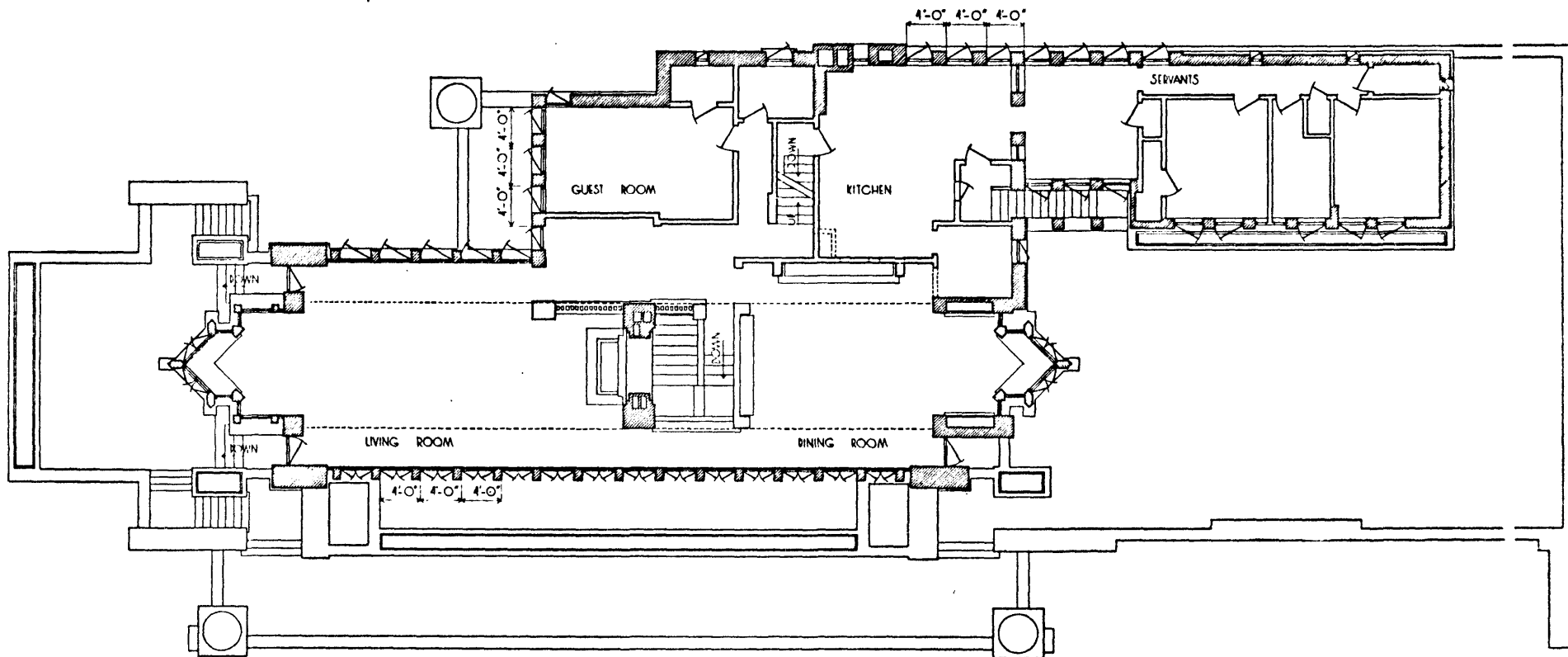
LONGITUDINAL SECTION



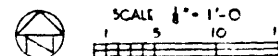
SOUTH ELEVATION

SECOND (MAIN) FLOOR PLAN

THE ORIGINAL BUILT-IN BUFFET SHOWN ON THE NORTH WALL OF THE DINING ROOM HAS BEEN REMOVED AND TWO DOORS HAVE BEEN CUT THROUGH THE WALL BEHIND IT. THE DOOR BETWEEN THE PANTRY AND THE DINING ROOM HAS BEEN ELIMINATED. ORIGINAL DRAWINGS DO NOT SHOW THE DOOR AT THE TOP OF THE REAR STAIRS TO THE GUEST ROOM. THE WOODEN PER AND SCREEN IN THE LIVING ROOM NEXT TO THE FIREPLACE HAVE BEEN REMOVED.



JANIS J. ERINS, DEL.



HABS CHICAGO PROJECT 1963

NAME OF STRUCTURE
FREDERICK C. ROBIE HOUSE

5757 SOUTH WOODLAWN AVENUE CHICAGO, COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS

SURVEY NO.
**ILL
1005**

HISTORIC AMERICAN
BUILDINGS SURVEY

SHEET 3 OF 14

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDmarks

THIRD FLOOR PLAN

A DOORWAY HAS BEEN INSERTED
BETWEEN THE MASTER BEDROOM
AND THE DRESSING ROOM.

